

# Intangible Cultural Heritage Update

## News and updates on Newfoundland and Labrador's Intangible Cultural Heritage Program

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ich@heritagefoundation.ca  
Dance Heritage Issue



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### Dance Heritage Think Tank

How many dancers does it take to preserve Newfoundland and Labrador heritage? The Dance Heritage Think Tank was held on February 21, 2009 to ponder issues pertaining to preserving the many dance traditions found throughout the province. Based on a National Dance Heritage Think Tank held in Toronto in the fall of 2008, our local version of this larger Think Tank was an ideal opportunity for members of the province's many dance communities to meet, network, share ideas and identify common goals.

The event generated much discussion and throughout the Think Tank, we found that participants identified similar desired outcomes. The three key issues that emerged:

- NL Dance Association should be formed to represent and connect all dance genres in the province
- Website should be created to link dance forms in NL, provide information on dance professionals, events, and resources
- Integration into educational system – university dance program should be created, and dance should be further integrated into K-12 system

So where do we go from here? The Think Tank organizing committee (Kristin Harris Walsh, Dale Jarvis, Calla Lachance and Colleen Quigley) is beginning the process to facilitate the creation of a provincial dance association. It is our hope that, once the association has been formed, that it will take initiative on the other recommendations from the Think Tank and act as an advocacy and networking group for dancers across the province.

**For more information on the Think Tank, and to read the report, check out:**

**<http://tinyurl.com/dancethinktank>**

# Notes on Scottish and English Country Dance

By Noreen McLennan

## Scottish Country Dance

Growing up in Scotland, I heard Scottish Dance Music at an early age as my father played these tunes on his fiddle. Just as musicians in Newfoundland gather in kitchens, there were many Saturday night sessions in our house, with children skipping around to the music.

In primary school the favourite recess activity was singing games such as The Grand Old Duke of York, I Sent My Love a Letter, Round and Round the Village and so on. Soon in school we were learning simple set dances The Haymakers' Jig, The White Cockade, The Machine Without Horses to name a few and these dances were also part of regular activities in Brownie and Girl Guide groups.

In high school, dances with more challenging figures were taught in gym classes some of these were Petronella, Corn Rigs and Flowers of Edinburgh and more emphasis was placed on footwork and deportment. Since these classes were segregated, girls dancing the boy's part had to wear red bands which was not popular when we had to dance that part. A few times a year, evening social

dances were held in the school gym which included those we had learned in class. Also on the programme were couple dances such as Military Two-Step, Gay Gordons, St. Bernard's Waltz to name a few. Of course this was well supervised by teachers which somewhat limited our exuberance.



There were also opportunities in the community to dance a more vigorous style, which today is referred to as Ceilidh Dancing. These were held in village halls or rural schools where classrooms were cleared for dancing on Friday or Saturday nights. These were community dances with no school influence so were much more lively. Strip the Willow was a favourite as it has lots of swinging. In square formation were The Eightsome Reel and The Lancers which had many of the figures found in the Newfoundland version.

In 1954, I emigrated to Toronto, Canada and sought out a dance group there. This was a small group of mainly recent immigrants, war brides and second generation Scots. Shortly thereafter more Scots arrived and classes were started in several parts of Toronto. By

advertising and word of mouth membership increased and more teachers were required. There is a certification process for teachers which follows a period of training. In 1957, Miss Milligan, one of the founders of The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS) arrived from Scotland to conduct examinations at the Preliminary Level and returned in 1959 to examine candidates for Full Certificate status. I was a successful candidate at both these sessions and taught classes in Toronto and in St. John's for many years.

Concurrent with activity in Scottish dance in Toronto, I became interested in international folk dance and joined a group where this was taught. We had interaction with some local ethnic groups, availing of their teachers to expand our repertoire and there were opportunities to take part with those groups in many Multicultural Festivals. Furthermore we often organized weekend workshops where our guest teacher was an expert in the dance of a specific nationality. On these occasions our focus was on music, folk art and costumes as well as dance from that specific country

When I came to St. John's in the sixties, I joined a group at the Kirk with many Scottish members including war brides. Later many of these members formed a group that met at the University. In the early eighties, I became the teacher of this group. Besides classes, we expanded the activities of the demonstration group and participated in many local events - The Folk



Festival, Multicultural programmes, the annual Burns' Supper, seniors' homes and schools etc. In 1985 we took part in the Fiddlers' Festival in the Codroy Valley. The following year we were invited by the French Government to participate in the Bastille Day Celebrations on St. Pierre and have also danced at out of town festivals in Brigus and Fogo Island. The St. John's



Branch of The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society continues to be active here and welcomes new members at any time. Classes are offered from September to December and from January to April and are held at Gower Street United Church on Monday evenings beginning at 7.45 pm. There are two levels - Beginners for newcomers where basics are taught and a Social Class for those with experience. Further information may be obtained from Ken Galbraith (Chairman) at 722-5787.

## English Country Dance

South of Boston, there is a paradise for dancers, musicians and singers. It is called Pinewoods, located in acres of pine tree woods bordering on a pond. Dotted throughout are cabins and state of the

art dance venues. It is owned and operated by The Country Dance and Song Society - CDSS - an organization founded in 1915 which "celebrates and preserves traditional English and Anglo-American dance, music and song". Week long sessions are offered all summer and in 1994 it was my pleasure to attend Scottish week as

my son, a musician, was on staff. The following year, 1995, I was again invited but this time it was for English-American week. It was my first exposure to English dance and by the end of the week I was a convert. Several people in St. John's had expressed an interest in the formation of a group to do English Dance so this was the beginning.

Martin Mulligan who also teaches Scottish dance here had done some English dancing in the past. Together we studied the dances in the manual I had purchased and Bruce Shawyer who plays piano practiced the music for dances we had chosen. In the Shawyers' living room some of our Scottish dance friends were the "guinea pigs" as we prepared to take the plunge and offer classes starting in the Fall of 1997 at St. David's Church on Elizabeth Avenue.



Over the past twelve years our membership has increased, as has the number of musicians we have playing for classes. With Bruce on piano, we now have three violins and a viola. Our repertoire is extensive and includes dances from the 17th century to the present day as new dances are being devised. The early dance masters, Playford, Thompson, Walsh etc devised dances such

as The Black Nag, Mr. Isaac's Maggot, Prince William, Zephyrs and

Flora, Sun Assembly all of which were published in collections at that time. Each year we conclude with a party at Bally Haly where everyone dresses to fit the occasion of a ball as we transport ourselves to a ballroom of an earlier era. The English Group continues to meet at St. David's Church, Elizabeth Avenue at 7.30pm on Wednesday nights. The Fall session is from September to December and at this time we welcome new members. The second session, January to April, is a continuation and is for experienced dancers.

*Further information may be obtained from*

*Bruce and Jo Shawyer - 739-5717 or Noreen MacLennan - 722-6393*

*Photos from a demonstration at the Commissariat House, fall 2008*



# Bellydance

*By Andrea Kitta, Neighbourhood Strays*

In my lifetime I have been a Bellydancer, an Oriental dancer, a Middle Eastern Dancer, a Gypsy dancer, a Romani dancer, a practioner of the art of Raks Sharki/Raks Al-Sharqi, Chifitelli, Danse du Ventre, Beladi/Balady and various incarnations and spellings of all of those words. Oddly enough, I have not changed dance styles, but rather the dance has changed names, often redefining itself at every turn.

I remember a time when it was inappropriate for bellydancers to use the terms “bellydance” because of the negative connotations associated with it. So, we tried traditional or cultural terms, only to have the public wonder what it was we do and why they would want to see it. “Middle Eastern Dancer” became common, regardless of style, until 9/11. After that, many dancers (myself included) decided to “take back” bellydance and make it “our” word, much to the chagrin of many of our instructors who fought so hard to make the dance respectable.

I partially understand what our bellydance ancestors endured. Over the years, I’ve calmly explained to festival organizers, other dancers, and the media that bellydance is “family oriented” (i.e. NOT stripping, although it does share a bit of history with burlesque). Before my time it was almost impossible to even see a bellydancer outside of a bellydance or specific, exclusive, cultural event. We weren’t invited to dance in public because people were afraid of what we might

do or how we might move. I’ve found that once people actually see bellydance, they start to understand it, but I’ve had to fight for the right to perform and be included along with other types of dance.

I’m happy to say that things have changed and I’m now the one contacted to dance at events. I knew bellydance had broken through the day my troupe was asked to perform at

schools and talk to Brownies and Girl

Guides. I’m consistently pleasantly surprised at our supporters and nothing makes me happier than seeing a row of nans sitting in their folding chairs, clapping along, while their grandchildren try to climb up on the stage to join us.

Bellydance has come a long way and most of that road has been full circle. Dancers have gone from dancing in the streets, to dancing in nightclubs, to dancing as the main act in beautiful theatres, to dancing in the streets again.

Our social acceptance waxes and wanes, the names and costumes change, but the feel is always consistent. Regardless of what is appropriate at the moment, we’re still just

a bunch of people who enjoy dancing together and creating something beautiful, albeit fleeting.

And you’re always welcome to join the dance!

*The Neighbourhood Strays are a gypsy-style bellydance troupe located in St. John's, Newfoundland.*

*[www.theneighbourhoodstrays.com](http://www.theneighbourhoodstrays.com)*

*Photo courtesy Terrilynn Colford*



## International Dance Day

*The following was provided by the Canadian Dance Assembly in their original press release for International Dance Day on April 8th, 2009.*

*The International Dance Day Message, commissioned by ITI – UNESCO, has been written this year by Akram Khan. Khan has been the recipient of numerous awards and accolades and is a highly acclaimed choreographer living and working in Britain today. His message is as follows:*

“This very special day is dedicated to the one language that everybody in this world can speak, the inherent language of our bodies and our souls, of our ancestors and of our children. This day is dedicated to every god, guru and grandparent that ever taught and inspired us. To every song and impulse and moment that's ever moved us to move. It is dedicated to the little child that wishes it could move like its star, And to the mother who says, 'you already can'. This day is dedicated to every body of every creed, colour and culture that carries the traditions of its past into stories of the present and dreams of the future. This day is dedicated to Dance, to its myriad dialects and its immense power to express, transform, unite and delight.”



## The Rainbow 50+ Lancers

The Lancers was a popular reel of several formations danced in many parts of Newfoundland about forty and more years ago to accordion music. Bill Fagan of the Rainbow 50+ Club in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's has revitalized the Lancers by teaching it to a number of the Club members, some of whom recall doing it over 40 years ago. The Club meets for cards/darts and a snack each Friday at 2:00 and holds a monthly dance. For an hour preceding the social on the first and third Fridays, the group dance the Lancers. They also arrange time for the Lancers during their monthly dance. A problem was finding music. An LP of Wilf Doyle was dubbed onto a DVD. Some modifications to the Lancers were made. While the Lancers were never "called", Fagan has composed a number of call directions as he guides the group through the formations. Also, among the seniors there is a much smaller proportion of males and so rather than referring to men and women, the reference is to "left hand partners" and "right hand partners".



The Lancers is danced in four formations: Meet and Greet, Left Hand Partners One Side-Right Hand Partners the Other, Right Hand to Your Partner, and Thread the Needle. The group has been invited by St. Lawrence Anglican Parish, Portugal Cove to perform the Lancers for their Seniors' recognition event in June and members of the Anglican Parish are also joining in, with practice at St. Lawrence Parish Hall on Wednesdays. The Lancers not only keeps our heritage alive, but is great physical and mental exercise, and great fun. The 50+ Club normally meets in the Town Recreation Centre but due to renovations there, currently meets in the Legion in Portugal Cove.

## The School Dance, I Remember

*Wendy Wagner of the Feather Point Dancers, Harbour Grace (shown below), supplied the ICH office with a wonderful memoir of community dance, written by former Feather Point dancer Evelyn French. A short excerpt is reprinted below, with permission from Evelyn's family.*



"My Uncle was the best dancer around, he was the Fred Astaire or the Gene Kelly of that day. Everyone loved to dance with him. He taught me how to dance with me standing on his feet. I was so little, I can not remember not knowing how to dance. We did several different dances, there was the Lancers, the Fisherman's Reel, Cadrill, these were all square dances and of course we had the Waltz and Two Step, the Old Fashioned Waltz and somethin' we called the Scuff. My Uncle Joe told me that my Grandfather did these same dances and he told him that Grandfather's Dad did the same dances, and these dances were brought to Newfoundland from England. Now that's a lot of years ago because I'm 73 years old and if my uncle were still here he would be 101 years old. But there was one dance we did in Bryants Cove

call the Reel and we changed this one and made it our own, they called it the Fisherman's Reel, it was a very interesting dance, all of the moves related to a boat and the sea and it is easily visualized when the music and dance comes together."